

ABSTRACT**METHODS OF DIFFERENTIATING AND PROTECTING CELLS BY
MODULATING THE P38/MEF2 PATHWAY**

The present invention provides a method of
5 differentiating progenitor cells to produce a population
containing protected neuronal cells. A method of the
invention includes the steps of contacting the progenitor
cells with a differentiating agent; and introducing into
the progenitor cells a nucleic acid molecule encoding a
10 MEF2 polypeptide or an active fragment thereof,
thereby differentiating the progenitor cells to produce a
population containing protected neuronal cells. In one
embodiment, the MEF2 polypeptide is human MEF2C or an
active fragment thereof.